

California M E D I C I N E

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE CALIFORNIA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

© 1959, by the California Medical Association

Volume 90

MAY 1959

Number 5

The Rules of Civility

FRANCIS E. WEST, M.D., San Diego

BACK IN THE YEAR 1743, a young man 16 years of age was concentrating on the writing of his own ideas of the "Rules of Civility."

This was a common practice in those days and dated back to the year 1595 when the French Jesuits set forth a list of important objectives in human relationships and deportment.

Today it might be called "How To Win Friends and Influence People." The logic is the same, although the language and terminology then was perhaps more lofty than is used in our current conversations and communications.

I was struck by this rule the young man had inscribed:

"In visiting the sick, do not presently play the physician if you be not knowing therein."

Thirty years later, the boy, then a man of 46, found himself at Valley Forge, the winter headquarters of the ragged, tired, weary and hungry soldiers of the Revolutionary Army. Those stalwarts numbered a scant 11,000 men.

Their leader, the man who had served his own conscience and his fellow patriots for the past three years without one cent of pay, of course, was General George Washington.

Every American knows how, from the depth of despair at Valley Forge, Washington's prayers were answered and he went on to set the Colonies free; that the final peace treaty with England made possible our United States of America.

Address of the President, presented before the Annual Meeting of the House of Delegates of the California Medical Association, February 22, 1959, San Francisco.

Our many freedoms, our many rights, the democracy we enjoy today result from the hardships and the suffering and the sacrifices and the determination of George Washington and his 11,000 men.

Here today we meet in free assemblage to speak our minds.

Day in and day out we practice our profession with a freedom circumscribed only by our own rules of civility—our ethics.

Where, in matters of setting standards of qualifications and education of our fellow practitioners, we have found it necessary for governmental regulation, we, the members of the profession, have pressed for that necessary legislation for the protection of our patients against the incompetent, the charlatan and the quack.

The members of the House of Delegates of the California Medical Association represent 17,000 American physicians. Think of it—6,000 more than Washington's entire Army at Valley Forge.

I believe it most fitting, therefore, that before we embark upon the matters before this free and unfettered gathering we pause for a moment to express our reverence to the great man whose 227th birth date anniversary we celebrate today.

Now for the convention affairs at hand.

It has been two years since I was named your President-Elect and assumed the presidency one year later.

During that time it has been my great pleasure to have visited all the county societies, many of the districts and to have attended meetings of specialty groups and to have consulted with officers of the

Bar and members of the California Hospital Association.

I leave the office with certain feelings of nostalgia because of the fine people I have met and the friends I have made.

To be sure, I have suffered some pangs during my term in office.

On the other hand, your C.M.A. has not been without its accomplishments in the over-all field of medical care for all the people of California.

These accomplishments, to be sure, have largely been the results of the efforts of the highly respected and capable men you have elected to office. I mean my colleagues on the Council who, in turn, have chosen wisely in naming the physician-members of the commissions and committees that have been doing the hard, grinding, time-consuming work of the California Medical Association since the last meeting of this House.

Here, I believe, is an opportune time to name two very important gentlemen who will loom large in the immediate future of C.M.A.

First, there is Dr. T. Eric Reynolds who, on Wednesday, will assume the presidency.

Be assured your affairs will be in good hands.

Eric Reynolds, I have found, is as capable as he is quiet and mild-mannered. And during 1959 you will learn what I already know—that he is a man of sound judgment backed by many years of experience as a practicing physician and in service to his own Alameda-Contra Costa Medical Society and C.M.A.

Next, the report of the Legal Counsel, Peart, Baraty and Hassard, following custom of long standing, will be made by Mr. Howard Hassard. But this year, Mr. Hassard comes before you as *both* our legal counsel *and* our newly appointed Executive Director, named by the Council to direct the internal affairs of C.M.A. I am distinctly proud to make this announcement at this time.

Hap Hassard and his firm, dating back to the days of the dearly beloved Hartley Peart, have served C.M.A. for the past 41 years. He, better than anyone else, knows *all* the workings of our Association. His influence for good has already been felt.

He has our every best wish and our united promise of the utmost of cooperation in the years ahead.

At the close of one's term—reaching the apogee of one's career in the official orbit of the Association—there is, of course, the temptation to “preach”—to prescribe “rules of conduct”—to cut a pattern to be followed in the future—to assume the role of the “elder statesman.”

On sober contemplation, however, on taking inventory of my capabilities, it would be presumptuous to address you in such a tone today.

Sober judgment, coupled with hard practicality, makes me realize that, in today's fast-moving world, edicts, warnings, elder statesmanship, predictions are of doubtful value.

And besides—who wants to be considered old?

In addition to those topics I have already mentioned, here then, are some things I *do* know about and can report to you:

For instance, C.M.A. will soon be headquartered in its own new building where our constantly increasing membership can be better served by a staff which, of necessity, has been enlarged to keep pace with our growth.

As to our relations with state and federal bodies, I can only state that, in my opinion, our performance record has merited a mark of “good.” Not excellence, perhaps, but “good.”

Collectively we can drop to “fair” or to “poor,” or we can approach “excellent” in direct proportion to the measure in which we follow Dr. Malcolm Watts' motto on the masthead of our Public Relations Department *Newsletter*. It reads:

“What is best for the patient is always best for medical practice and for the doctor.”

California's esteemed Dr. Dwight H. Murray has translated the same statement legislatively in his straightforward declaration that:

“Satisfied patients always have been and always will be our first line of defense against government domination of our profession.”

It has been my experience that when we bring these two fundamentals with us into our discussions with all groups—and that includes discussions *within* the profession; when we stand by these principles—we are understood and we are respected.

Understanding is often slow—difficult to achieve. However, once fully understood in our position of concern for patients, we then can expect to earn respect.

The profession is at its best—is understood and believed—when it is concerning itself with matters medical be they in the realm of politics, care for certain segments of our population designated by the elected representatives of the voters, or in the field of voluntary, prepaid medical and hospital insurance.

“General” Dwight Murray can tell you about a mere 7,000 physicians holding the line against Governor Warren and an entire administration's attempt to socialize our profession; how his “tired and weary” physician-soldiers staged a winning battle against medical oppression.

That was 14 years ago, back in 1945.

Members of the legislature believed the physicians' arguments; that the medical profession, the Blue Plans and the private insurance carriers, not

politicians, could best provide medical care insurance for the people of California.

More recently in our negotiations with State Welfare Department officials, the profession prevailed in removing prior authorizations in the care of the aged because we proved that we could be trusted to decide how best to treat our patients.

Likewise, the growth of voluntary health insurance plans attests the public's faith in the profession's knowledge and sincerity in this ever-expanding field.

We can maintain our reputation, our integrity, so long as we meet our expected duties, our self-proclaimed responsibilities.

These duties and responsibilities are seemingly small matters to physicians who uphold them every day in their practices and to county societies that insist upon their implementation.

They include the provision of medical care for all regardless of inability to pay.

They include the provision of emergency care on a 24-hour basis.

And they further include the operation of Public Service committees where misunderstandings between physician and patient can be resolved.

Truly, my greatest concern for the future of medicine stems back to the necessity for our constant vigilance to see that these three important promises to patients, to voters are kept.

Once we lose sight of the truths of the Murrays and the Watts' we fail in our duties as individual physicians. Collectively, the profession is then headed for serious troubles. In even simpler words:

Any regimentation, in my opinion, will not stem from *without*. It can come, however, from a lack of self-discipline and meeting up to our responsibilities *within* the profession.

I mentioned the year 1945 and our 7,000 doctors to emphasize our great growth both in population generally and in the number of physicians. In a manner of speaking we are a new state. We are new in the sense that we've long since made the transition from agriculture to commerce. Much of our population is new! Our physician population has more than doubled in recent years.

But our responsibilities to our patients; the responsibilities of the older physician and the new one to the population, *both old and new*, remain the same. And all residents over the age of 21, may I emphasize, have an *equal* vote.

As members of the House of Delegates of the California Medical Association, the elected representatives of your constituent societies, *you* must assume the responsibility to be ever watchful to see that our standards are maintained and our promises to the public are remembered and fulfilled.

Just what is the California Medical Association?

The booklet sent out to new members of the C.M.A. by Mr. John Hunton states:

"C.M.A. is actually a federation of county medical societies, 40 of them located in all parts of California. Its membership is made up of the combined memberships of the county societies—it has no members except the county society members."

This, then, means to me that C.M.A. encompasses the young general practitioner just starting his practice in Chula Vista or Eureka, the specialists on Sutter and Post streets in San Francisco and on Wilshire Boulevard or in Beverly Hills in the Los Angeles area.

It means the physician in public health, the professor at one of our five fine medical schools, the deans, the researcher, the young resident and our semi-retired elder colleagues. And the new men coming from other states to take up practice in California.

These are the men and women who make up our Association, the second largest—and soon to be the largest—medical Association in America.

You are the men who represent them. . . . All of them.

While you—while we—are gathered here to conduct the organizational phase of our federation of the 40 county societies, an even greater number of our confreres are assembled in meetings throughout the city, conducting or attending scientific phases of our convention.

Present here too are the gentlemen of the press who are here to report the deliberations of this meeting as well as the progress on the research and the scientific side of our profession.

These members of the Fourth Estate are here to report what they hear and see.

Their reports go out all over the state and nation to their readers—the voters—our patients.

I can only hope that what they hear and see in both forums will be constructive; in this assembly for the care of the business of the Association, but, more important, in the assemblies where we are disseminating the knowledge of the progress we are making in the care of our patients.

One final word: I thank you all for the confidence you showed in me when you elected me to office two years ago. It has been a high privilege and a great honor to serve you. I can only hope that I have, in some small measure, lived up to your confidence and to that honor.

There is but one other thing:

As young George came near the close of his "Rules of Civility," he wrote:

*"Undertake not what you cannot perform,
and be careful to keep your promises!"*

2850 Sixth Avenue, San Diego 3.